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LETTER DATED 27 SEPTEMBER 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH THE HOST COUNTRY

I have the honour to forward to you copy of a protest note verbale dated 26 September 1996 sent by the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the United Nations to the United States Mission to the United Nations concerning an incident involving the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H.E. Chief Tom Ikimi, which occurred on Thursday, 26 September 1996, at John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York, and to request that the text of the note verbale (see annex) be circulated as an official document of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country.

(Signed) Ibrahim A. GAMBARI

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ANNEX

Note verbale dated 26 September 1996 from the Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations addressed to the United States Mission to the United Nations

The Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the United Nations presents its compliments to the United States Mission to the United Nations and wishes to protest to the latter against an incident involving the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H.E. Chief Tom Ikimi, which occurred today, 26 September 1996, at John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York.

The Minister arrived at New York by Swissair flight SR 110 to attend the session of the United Nations General Assembly currently being held in New York. He was escorted from the aircraft by a member of the staff of Swissair, Ms. Christina Aki, who took him and members of his entourage to the VIP immigration counter. The Minister's diplomatic passport and those of the members of his entourage were given to an immigration inspector, one Mr. R. Charles, who after checking the passports held them for some time without any explanation. After a long, unexplained delay, Mr. Charles disappeared with the passports for what turned out to be a consultation with the supervising immigration inspector, Ms. K. Celentano. Following repeated inquiries by officers from the Mission, who were at the airport to receive the Minister, Chief Ikimi was told that the Immigration authorities were trying to contact the State Department in Washington for the purpose of obtaining clearance, following their observation that the visa issued to the Minister and his entourage had restrictions on their movements while in the United States.

The Mission wishes to state that the excuse given by the supervising immigration inspector was unacceptable, for the State Department must have been aware of the Minister's journey, since it was the United States Embassy in Nigeria, an arm of the State Department, that had issued the entry visas. Also, the Minister was fully aware of the restrictions before embarking on the journey. And finally, the Minister had been to the United States several times with the same restrictions on his visa but had never experienced any problem at the airport of entry. The Mission has therefore concluded that what happened at the airport today was a deliberate attempt to embarrass and humiliate the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Although after an hour of unnecessary and embarrassing delay the Minister and his entourage were allowed into the United States, the Permanent Mission strongly objects to this incident, which constituted a serious embarrassment to the person of the Minister and to the dignity of Nigeria and was in total disregard of the fact that H.E. Chief Tom Ikimi and his entourage possessed the necessary entry visas into the United States. The incident forced him to miss an important scheduled engagement at the United Nations. It is also necessary to emphasize the fact that the only reason for the Minister's visit was to attend the session of the United Nations General Assembly. The Mission protests in strong terms against this unwarranted incident and requests that it be promptly clarified so as to avoid any repetition of same in the future.